

two or three nesting pairs of eagles that were left in our region of the country. That is now up over 84 nesting pairs of eagles. We expect those numbers to increase in ensuing years as well.

We see the natural wonders of the Lake Erie marshlands as an economic boon to our north coast region through ecotourism, which is expanding. We want families to enjoy the roller coasters at Cedar Point in Sandusky and then drive a few miles west to see the bald eagles at the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. We want tourists to enjoy some of the greatest fishing on Earth. I would like to say that I represent the bathtub of the Great Lakes. We have more fish and more swimmers than any other part of the region, or anyplace in the world, in the central and western basins of Lake Erie and also some of the greatest bird watching in the world as well.

H.R. 289 will help us build on this momentum, not only for Ottawa but also for the Lower Detroit International Wildlife Refuge. I want to personally express my deep gratitude to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. DINGELL), seniority number one here in the House, for his leadership for our entire region.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the Members to vote "yes" on H.R. 289.

Mr. GILCREST. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 289.

This proposal has been the subject of two congressional hearings. We have heard from a diverse group of witnesses testifying in strong support of expanding the boundaries of these two existing refuges. One of those witnesses is the director of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. In his statement, Mr. Samuel Speck noted that this measure will "ensure an abundance of ecological and conservation improvements that will truly benefit this "Great Lake" and the millions of Americans who benefit from it".

The fundamental goal of H.R. 289 is to conserve the wetland resources of the western basin of Lake Erie. This shallow body of water is, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, the 11th largest fresh water lake in the world and it has the most productive fishing habitat in all of the Great Lakes.

While sadly more than 98 percent of the original wetlands in Northwest Ohio have been lost, the remaining 12,500 acres provide irreplaceable habitat for 325 species of birds, 300 species of plants and 43 fish species. In fact, the western basin is used by 70 percent of the black ducks that migrate in the Mississippi flyway and it provides nesting habitat for 79 breeding pairs of bald eagles.

The remaining wetlands should be protected and the most effective way to accomplish that goal is to include available habitat within the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Furthermore, it is my hope that by expanding these refuges, all interested parties will work together to devise a comprehensive strategy to protect and restore the physical and biological integrity of the Lake Erie western basin ecosystem.

I urge an "aye" vote and I compliment my colleagues MARCY KAPTUR and JOHN DINGELL for proposing this innovative legislation.

Mr. DINGELL. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 289, legislation that I co-authored with the distinguished gentlewoman from Toledo, Ms. KAPTUR. This important fish and wildlife conservation measure will expand the boundaries of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge to encompass important lands in Southeastern Michigan and Northern Ohio. It is of immense importance to the people of Southeast Michigan and our neighbors to the South in Ohio.

I would like to thank Chairman GILCREST and Ranking Member PALLONE for their leadership and their assistance. I would also like to thank the Chairman of the full Committee, RICHARD POMBO, and Ranking Member NICK RAHALL, for their assistance in shepherding this bill to the floor. Your efforts are greatly appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, in 2001, thanks to the leadership of the Resources Committee and the support from local grassroots organizations, conservation groups, state and local governments, as well as our Canadian neighbors, we were able to create the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. Our refuge on the Detroit River is already demonstrating how—working as a team—federal, state, and local officials in the United States and Canada, can work with businesses, conservationists and private citizens to preserve our remaining wildlife habitat along the River and improve the quality of life. H.R. 289 builds on that success, expanding the refuge south into Ohio, to protect the Lake Erie shoreline.

The lands we are talking about encompass an area of tremendous bio-diversity, with unique geological features and a wide variety of plant life that attracts numerous species of fish, birds, and waterfowl.

In the Great Lakes region, there is a tremendous urgency to protect our remaining high-quality habitats before they are lost to further development. We must also do our utmost to rehabilitate and enhance degraded habitat. This is essential to sustain the quality of life enjoyed by the people living along the Detroit River and the Lake Erie corridor.

The Western basin of Lake Erie is vitally important to the economic and environmental future of the United States. In the 1970s and 1980s, the ecological health of Lake Erie was a running joke—fisherman derisively renamed Lake Erie "The Dead Sea." Water quality was poor, and fish and wildlife suffered as a result.

But in the past two decades, the citizens and governmental institutions of both the United States and Canada have devoted increasing attention and resources to the restoration of the water quality and the fisheries of the Great Lakes, including the Western basin. Numerous grassroots environmental and conservation organizations have worked dutifully to address environmental degradation in the region. I am happy to say that these efforts have been successful, though there is still much more that must be done.

The coastal wetlands of Lake Erie support the largest diversity of plant and wildlife species in the Great Lakes. More than 320 species of birds and 43 species of fish have been identified in the aquatic and wetland habitats of the Western basin. The shallow Western basin is home to the largest concentration of marshes in Lake Erie, which makes it a major migratory bird corridor. Seventy percent of the Mississippi Flyway population of black ducks is concentrated in the Lake Erie marshes during fall migration.

The important of Lake Erie is manifested in the United States congressional designation of the Ottawa and Cedar Point National Wildlife Refuges. Lake Erie has an international reputation for walleye, perch, and bass fishing, as well as duck hunting. On an economic basis, Lake Erie tourism accounts for an estimated \$1.5 billion in retail sales and more than 50,000 jobs.

In Michigan, the Refuge will run from the southern boundary of Sterling State Park to the eastern edge of Sandusky Bay, Ohio. The Secretary of Interior is authorized to acquire by donation, purchase with donated or appropriated funds, or grant conservation easements with the boundaries of the Refuge. Any and all acquisitions of lands are voluntary, and federal takings are strictly prohibited. I would note that the Secretary shall administer all federally owned lands, waters, and interests within the Refuge in accordance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act. Thus, the rights of sportsmen and waterfowlers like myself to hunt and fish in accordance with state law will be protected.

Mr. Speaker, I again thank the Resources Committee for their assistance. Ms. KAPTUR's bill is an important piece of legislation which will be great benefit to the people of Michigan, Ohio, and Ontario, and represents a sound approach to protecting, preserving, and restoring the wildlife habitat of the Great Lakes. I urge its adoption.

Ms. BORDALLO. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. RENZI. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. RENZI) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 289, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. RENZI. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material in the RECORD on H.R. 622, H.R. 762, and H.R. 289, the three bills just considered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Arizona?

There was no objection.

EXPRESSING SENSE OF CONGRESS REGARDING THE BLUE STAR BANNER AND THE GOLD STAR

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 109) expressing the sense of the Congress regarding the Blue Star Banner and the Gold Star, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 109

Whereas the Blue Star Flag (commonly referred to as the "Blue Star Banner") was

patented and designed in 1917, during the height of the World War I, by Army Captain Robert L. Queissner of the 5th Ohio Infantry, who had two sons serving on the front lines;

Whereas the Blue Star Flag quickly became the symbol for a family member serving the Nation in the Armed Forces, and families began proudly displaying these flags in their front windows during World War I;

Whereas each Blue Star on the flag represents a family member serving in the Armed Forces and symbolizes hope and pride;

Whereas beginning in 1918, the Blue Star would signify the living, and a smaller Gold Star would be placed on top of the Blue Star, forming a blue border, if the family member was killed or died while on active duty, to symbolize the family member's sacrifice for the cause of freedom;

Whereas Blue Star Flags were displayed widely during World War II;

Whereas many of the flags displayed during those wars were hand-made by the mothers of those serving in the Armed Forces;

Whereas the legacy of the Blue Star Flag continued during the Korean, Vietnam, and Persian Gulf Wars and other periods of conflict, as well as in times of peace;

Whereas the Blue Star Flag is the official flag authorized by law, at section 901 of title 36, United States Code, to be displayed in honor of a family member serving the United States on active duty in the Armed Forces during a period of war or hostilities, while the Gold Star may be displayed in honor of a family member who has made the ultimate sacrifice for the Nation;

Whereas for over 85 years, families have proudly displayed the Blue Star Flag showing United States service personnel the honor and pride that is taken in their sacrifices for freedom;

Whereas the flag may be displayed by members of the immediate family of a loved one serving in the Armed Forces;

Whereas the flag may be flown by families with a service member stationed either domestically or overseas;

Whereas the display of the flag in the front window of a home shows a family's pride in their loved one and is a reminder that preserving America's freedom demands great sacrifice; and

Whereas such a reminder is especially timely during the current conflict with Iraq and the global war on terrorism: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That the Congress—

(1) honors members of the United States Armed Forces and their families;

(2) calls on all Americans to honor the members of the United States Armed Forces and their families, to recognize the importance of the Blue Star Flag and the Gold Star and their symbolism of the devotion and service of the members of the United States Armed Forces, and to advance awareness of the Blue Star Flag and the Gold Star through all appropriate information and media channels; and

(3) encourages the families of members of the Armed Forces to proudly display the Blue Star Flag or, if their loved one has made the ultimate sacrifice, the Gold Star.

SEC. 2. The authority on which this resolution rests is the authority of Congress to make all laws which shall be necessary and proper as provided in Article I, section 8 of the United States Constitution.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Nevada (Mr. GIBBONS) and the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Nevada (Mr. GIBBONS).

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GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H. Con. Res. 109, the concurrent resolution under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MILLER of Florida). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Nevada?

There was no objection.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 6 minutes to the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. SHADEGG), the author of this resolution.

Mr. SHADEGG. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

I rise in strong support of the resolution. This is a grand tradition of our Nation, and this resolution encourages all Americans to honor the Blue Star Banner and the Gold Star as patriotic symbols of the proud tradition of the families of our fighting men.

This tradition was started in World War I when, in 1917, the Blue Star Banner was designed by an Army veteran Captain Robert L. Queissner, who had two sons serving on the front lines during World War I. The design is to symbolize the number of members of the family from that household who are currently serving in our armed services; and the intent of the resolution is to simply encourage American families with service personnel currently serving in our Armed Forces to proudly display this banner.

The banner became a particularly strong symbol. Mothers across the country embraced it as a symbol of devotion and their pride for family members who were serving in the war, and it came to its pinnacle of recognition during World War II. As a matter of fact, I would remind my colleagues that in the movie *Saving Private Ryan*, they may recall that as the Army sedan pulls up to the home of the Ryans, we can see a Blue Star Banner in the window of their home, acknowledging that a member of their family was serving in the war.

If more than one member of the family is serving in the armed services at the time of the combat, then there are as many blue stars as there are members of the family currently serving.

This symbol, as I said, reached its pinnacle during World War II when great pride was exhibited by our American families for the service men and women from their families who were currently serving. It has fallen into some disuse since then, and this resolution simply calls upon all American service families to proudly display the Blue Star Banner, acknowledging that a member of that household's family is currently serving in our armed services somewhere around the world.

Clearly, we are at war. We are at war not only to liberate Iraq, but we are

also at war across the globe in our war against terrorism, in Afghanistan but elsewhere around the world; and we all, every single one of us, are tremendously proud of our Armed Forces and the battle that they are carrying forward both to liberate Iraq but also to battle and fight terrorism wherever it appears around the globe.

Our hope, my hope as a sponsor of this resolution, is that all families with service personnel currently serving in our Armed Forces will proudly display the Blue Star Banner, and that all Americans across the Nation will recognize the Blue Star Banner as a symbol of pride and dedication, recognizing not just the sacrifice of the individual service member, man or woman, in our armed services at this critical point in our Nation's history, but also the sacrifice made by that family.

It seems to me that this is a particularly important time, and my hope is that across the country these banners will spring up, hanging in the windows of families with service personnel and that all of us, as a Nation, all of us who do not have a family member serving in the armed services, will step forward and tell those families how much we appreciate not only the sacrifice that the individual serviceman or servicewoman is making to serve our Nation at this critical point in time, but also that the family is making. It seems to me that this is indeed a grand tradition and one that is very important.

I need to go on and explain, however, the tradition of the Gold Star because the Gold Star carries this tradition one step further. As we know as Americans, as the world knows, freedom is not free. It comes at a very heavy price. Not far from here, at Bethesda Naval Hospital, there are many injured servicemen who have come back from the war to liberate Iraq and who are there being healed. But we also know that some service members already in this war have lost their lives.

The tradition of the Gold Star shortly followed the Blue Star Banner, and the Gold Star is a star which is displayed by a family when they have lost a family member, that is, when a member of the service has made the ultimate sacrifice. Tragically, that has happened in this war. Tragically, we have lost all too many soldiers in this war, and the tradition is that when a family member is lost, when a family member has made the final sacrifice, that the Gold Star is placed over the Blue Star, acknowledging that someone from that home has made the ultimate sacrifice.

This concurrent resolution, the Blue Star Banner and the Gold Star, is supported by many groups across the country, the American Legion and its efforts all across the country. The Blue Star Mothers of America, the American Gold Star Mothers and the Gold Star Wives of America, as well as the Veterans of Foreign Wars, are all supporting these banners. Indeed, this is the official banner recognized by Congress in 1967 and by the Department of

Defense as the official acknowledgment of the fact that there is a family member in the services.

This morning at the press conference we held on this topic, a representative of the Gold Star Mothers came forward, and she made it very clear, along with a representative of the Gold Star Wives, that they did not want their group to expand, that indeed because the Blue Star Banner is a moment of pride for a service member serving, the Gold Star Banner, of course, is an acknowledgment of a lost life; and the women from the Gold Star Wives and the American Gold Star Mothers came forward and said they do not want their groups to expand, of course because the only way one gains membership in the group of Gold Star Mothers or Gold Star Wives is to lose a family member. I think every member of the Nation hopes that the Gold Star does not expand, but each day as this war goes forward there is the risk of that.

I think it is time for America to passionately thank our armed services personnel. The Blue Star Banner and the Gold Star are a great tradition for doing that.

I urge my colleagues not to just embrace this resolution and vote for it, but go home and talk about it in their districts, tell their constituents, let them know of this grand tradition, encourage every single family with a member in our armed services to fly the Blue Star Banner with great pride and let every other American express their gratitude and their thanks to those service personnel serving.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

First, let me compliment the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. SHADEGG) for offering this resolution before the Congress, the sense of Congress regarding the Blue Star Banner and the Gold Star. I think this is certainly fitting and proper considering the fact that we today are at war in Iraq, considering the fact that we already have lost American lives in that conflict.

I remember as a young boy growing up in my hometown of Lexington, Missouri, and seeing these banners with Blue Stars and some with two Blue Stars and some with Gold Stars, knowing the fact that members of the family, either a sailor or sometimes brothers; or sometimes a soldier would lose his life on the battlefield and the Gold Star would hang in the window of that family's home. And I think it is certainly fitting that we, in our own way, express our sense that this is the right thing to do now, to bring it home to America that these young men and women who literally put their lives on the line should be remembered in such a visible and fine way.

Cicero, the great Roman orator, once said that gratitude is the greatest of all virtues, and this is one way, a small way, be that as it may, to express the gratitude of not just the Congress but

of the American people for the young people who risk their lives on the battlefield.

So, as a cosponsor of this House concurrent resolution, I support this measure. It is a timely resolution recognizing the importance of Blue Stars and Gold Star banners. The Blue Star Banner actually emerged during the First World War when Army Captain Robert Queissner designed a Blue Star to honor his two sons who were serving on the front lines during that conflict. The patented star soon became the country's unofficial symbol which families used to recognize a child serving in our Armed Forces.

In 1918, President Woodrow Wilson approved a recommendation by the Women's Committee of the Council of National Defenses that mothers who had lost a child in conflict wear a Gold Star on the traditional black mourning arm-band. Thus began the tradition of covering a Blue Star with a Gold Star when a family lost such a loved one.

The Department of Defense has recognized the banner as an official service flag for immediate family members of servicemen and women to display during any period of war or hostilities in which the American Armed Forces are engaged.

As I mentioned, when I was a boy growing up in my hometown of Lexington, I still recall those Blue Stars, those banners, hanging in the windows of homes as fathers or mothers, husbands, wives and sons and daughters left to serve our Nation in that Second World War. As men and women were called upon to serve our Nation, the prevalence of the Blue and the Gold Star Banners became a familiar sight wherever we went in my hometown. It was during the Second World War that organizations also displayed the banner to recognize their members who were serving in uniform.

Today, Mr. Speaker, as one travels across our wonderful land, one can still find these traditional symbols being proudly displayed. However, while we have more than a million service members in uniform as we speak, the use of the banner has steadily declined and, sadly, this American tradition has faded. Many Americans no longer recognize this banner for the important part it has played in the history of our country, particularly the military history of our country, and yet American men and women are still called upon to defend our freedoms. Korea, Vietnam, Operation Desert Storm, the Balkans, Afghanistan, and now Operation Iraqi Freedom are just a few of the conflicts which our Armed Forces have served.

This last September, as American forces continued the fight against terrorists, this House of Representatives passed a similar resolution that called upon the President to issue a proclamation in support of the Blue and the Gold Star Banners. As our forces continue to engage in battle in the Middle East, I urge the President to issue a proclamation that calls upon families

of service members to display the Blue Star Banner in patriotic support of our loved ones.

As our men and women in uniform fight to bring democracy and stability to the people of Iraq, I hope that we will restore this proud tradition. And it is a proud tradition. I urge all Americans to restore the display of a star for their loved ones who are defending the freedoms that this body was founded upon.

So it is with pleasure, Mr. Speaker, that I endorse and urge this House of Representatives to pass this resolution and that we have a unanimous vote in favor of the Blue Stars and the Gold Stars to be displayed on the banners in our windows of our homes.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BURNS).

Mr. BURNS. Mr. Speaker, this resolution is powerful. It is powerful because it says that if one has a loved one in the armed services, we encourage them to fly a Blue Star Banner. It is powerful because it encourages those families who have lost a loved one in the service of his or her country to display a Gold Star on that same banner. The Blue Star Banner and the Gold Star are symbols not only of our men and women in uniform and the sacrifices that they make for our freedoms, but they are also symbols of hope, symbols of love, and symbols of sacrifice of families who give so much for our troops.

Mr. Speaker, this resolution is particularly significant to me because many of the troops who are leading the charge of our military in Iraq come from the Third Infantry Division out of Fort Stewart, Georgia. These fine young men and women have gone to Iraq. Some, sadly, will make the ultimate sacrifice for freedom and not return. But this legislation is a visible symbol of our support for our troops, their families, and their collective sacrifices for all of our freedoms.

□ 1400

I am proud to be a cosponsor of this resolution, and I urge its immediate passage.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SOLIS).

Ms. SOLIS. Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) for conducting this discussion and our friends on the other side of the aisle.

I rise today also to strongly support this resolution. Popular during World War II, we are seeing the Blue Star Banners flown again. I brought a copy of one, because these are being proudly flown in my own district in the cities of El Monte and West Covina, and they are being displayed by families who have loved ones serving in the Armed

Forces, whether their family member is a son, daughter, brother, sister, wife, husband, or even a grandchild.

The banner shows a family's pride in their loved one serving in the military. It also reminds us that we are preserving America's freedom and that demands so much.

Blue Star Mothers and Gold Star Mothers organizations were established back in World War I and remain active even today. There are Blue Star Moms that are popping up in my district where I live in the city of El Monte. Unfortunately, we are also seeing more families displaying Gold Stars on their banners. Families like the Flores family in my district who just learned that they lost their son, Francisco A. Martinez Flores, who was killed in Iraq.

We must honor the United States Armed Forces and their families because they are all heroes. I encourage these families to proudly display the Blue Star Banner.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the resolution offered by the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. SHADEGG), and I commend the gentleman for bringing this important resolution to the attention of the House.

House Concurrent Resolution 109 reminds the Nation of one of our most cherished wartime traditions, having the families of military servicemembers display the Blue Star Service Flag and wear a service lapel pin.

The daily lives of most Americans remain unchanged by the conflict in Iraq and the war on terrorism. Aside from the television news coverage, many Americans do not think about these very challenging conflicts during the rush of their busy days. However, there are hundreds of thousands of Americans whose family members are fighting on the front lines of these 21st century wars and enduring all the same dangers and hardships that confronted our warriors during previous conflicts.

Mr. Speaker, all of us need to remember that these Americans are experiencing this war in a very personal manner and with a level of fear and uncertainty for loved ones in uniform that only they can understand.

Mr. Speaker, that is why the Blue Star Service Flag and its accompanying service lapel pin are so important. They will be an eloquent reminder for friends and neighbors that our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines are fighting and sacrificing their lives to keep us safe and to keep us free.

We can all benefit from a short, somber moment every day to remember those brave Americans and pledge to do more during our day to support our troops and the families they leave behind.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague and friend, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON), for his lifelong dedication to

the service and our troops. It is a pleasure to serve on the committee with him as the ranking member. Again, I want to commend the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. SHADEGG), and I urge strong support for this resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Let me first compliment the gentleman from Nevada (Mr. GIBBONS) for bringing this important resolution to the floor. Let me share, if I may, Mr. Speaker, an experience I had yesterday.

I went out to Bethesda Naval Hospital, and I had the opportunity to visit with seven of the 10 young Marines and one sailor who were injured in the Iraqi war, the Iraqi conflict, and some of them were injured rather severely. I have to tell my colleagues that of the seven I visited, all seven were extremely strong in morale, they backed the purpose of our being in Iraq, and were just proud to be United States Marines. I met some of their families too, and what great American families they were. And these families, I know full well, will display with great pride and affection the Blue Star Banner that we are speaking of, which the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. SHADEGG) was good enough to endorse through his resolution.

So let us hope that every member of our military's families will display this banner with pride and exhibit the pride of the families I saw yesterday with those injured Marines at the Bethesda Naval Hospital. I am proud of them. I am proud of everyone who wears the American uniform.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SPRATT).

Mr. SPRATT. Mr. Speaker, I commend both sides for the bipartisan effort they have made here to restore a proud, proud tradition. I am just old enough to remember the Gold Star and Blue Star Banners. I am a war baby born in 1942. But I still have a dim recollection of that and a warm feeling of the pride that those who displayed these banners had, to let all the community know that they had a loved one who was serving abroad or serving in service at some place in time.

I spent this past weekend, Sunday afternoon, in the little town of Jefferson, South Carolina, where we had a memorial service for a staff sergeant in the Air Force, Jason Higgs, whose helicopter was on a rescue mission to pick up two Afghan girls, both of whom were in need of medical care, to bring them back and have them attended to by Air Force doctors. He did not make it back. The next day they sent for the girls, they had their surgery, that was successful. Sunday afternoon we laid him to rest.

All over America there are countless stories like this, about these folks who are laying their lives on the line for us and our freedom. This is a wonderful

tradition to restore, and I wholeheartedly support this legislation.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I have no additional speakers, except to thank the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. SHADEGG) for this resolution and to thank the gentleman from Nevada (Mr. GIBBONS) for sponsoring this resolution. I think it is very, very important that every American family have the opportunity to display a banner such as this resolution endorses, that every American family that does not have a loved one in uniform understands, recognizes, and appreciates those families that do.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, with the eloquent words of my friend, the gentleman from Missouri, I would also urge each and every one of our colleagues to support this resolution.

Mr. FOSSELLA. Mr. Speaker, it is my great pleasure to take a moment to speak about the Blue Star Banner and the Gold Star.

As we continue to battle the enemy of freedom, each day many Americans bid farewell to a loved one that is a member of our Armed Forces, not knowing where they will go or when they will return, these families only have symbols of their loved ones.

These brave men and women who proudly wear our military's uniforms leave behind equally brave friends and relations who look for some way to remain connected to their loved ones abroad. Those on the homefront are eager to show their support for our troops, their hope for a safe return, and their pride in the actions and bravery of their loved ones. The Blue and Gold Star Banner emphasizes the special and difficult role of the family left behind in time of war.

Recognizing this desire to show support and pride for our family members who are off to battle, Army Captain Robert L. Queissner designed the Blue Star Banner in 1917, initially in support of his two sons who were serving on the front lines in World War I. The popularity of this banner spread quickly among those whose family members were also fighting in the War, and continued through many years and many battles to be displayed by families nationwide who anxiously awaited their loved ones' return.

The families of those who did not make it back home displayed a Gold Star over the Blue Star Banner, to symbolize the honor with which their loved ones perished in the name of freedom. This practice continues today, as a way for families to show their pride in the valiant actions of their loved ones in service to our country, who have made the ultimate sacrifice on our behalf.

I therefore encourage the families of all American servicemembers to display the Blue Star Banner and, as necessary, the Gold Star, in show of unconditional support for and pride in our nation's Armed Forces.

Mr. GILLMOR. Mr. Speaker, I proudly rise today in support of H. Con. Res. 109. The Blue Star Banner was originally patented and designed in 1917, by Spanish-American War Veteran and World War I Army Captain Robert L. Queissner of the 5th Ohio Infantry, who at that time had two sons serving on the frontlines. Since its unofficial adoption back in the early 20th century, it has grown to become the

official symbol of all mothers who have children proudly serving their country in the Armed Forces. As our history shows, many of the brave men and women who have so honorably served this country in battle have indeed made the ultimate sacrifice to ensure that the United States of America remains the beacon of freedom and prosperity throughout the world. To honor these fallen heroes family members who lost loved ones in the defense of liberty began placing a gold star over the blue star to symbolize their sacrifice. As we speak, our courageous service men and women continue to secure the safety of the world and bring freedom to oppressed peoples. Therefore, it is only appropriate that we pass this resolution today and show our solidarity and resolve not only to those who serve, but to their family members that they have left behind here on the home-front. Mr. Speaker, I would urge all my colleagues to pass this resolution and show that the steadfastness of the American spirit starts here in the United States Congress.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ISAKSON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Nevada (Mr. GIBBONS) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 109, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

APPOINTMENT OF CONFEREES ON H. CON. RES. 95, CONCURRENT RESOLUTION ON THE BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2004

Mr. NUSSLE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take from the Speaker's table the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 95) establishing the congressional budget for the United States Government for the fiscal year 2004, and setting forth appropriate budgetary levels for fiscal years 2003 and 2005 through 2013, with the Senate amendment thereto, disagree to the Senate amendment, and agree to a conference asked by the Senate on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Iowa?

There was no objection.

MOTION TO INSTRUCT OFFERED BY MR. SPRATT

Mr. SPRATT. Mr. Speaker, I offer a motion to instruct conferees.

The Clerk read as follows:

Mr. SPRATT moves that within the scope of the conference (1) the managers on the part of the House at the conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the Senate amendment to the concurrent resolution

H. Con. Res. 95 be instructed to eliminate the reconciliation instruction to the Committee on Agriculture, the Committee on Education and the Workforce, the Committee on Energy and Commerce, the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and the Committee on Ways and Means contained in section 201(b) of the House resolution; that (2) such managers be instructed to recede to the Senate on section 319 (entitled "Reserve Fund to Strengthen Social Security") of the Senate amendment; and that (3) such managers be instructed to adjust the revenue levels by the amounts needed to offset the cost of the instructions set forth in paragraphs (1) and (2), without resulting in any increase in the deficit or reduction in surplus for any fiscal year covered by the resolution.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SPRATT) and the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. NUSSLE) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SPRATT).

Mr. SPRATT. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, but for one vote, the budget resolution that we now seem to send to conference would have gone down. Fortunately, there is still a way out for this budget with its massive deficits and its misguided priorities: we can rewrite it in conference. If we cut through all the words, all the legislative language and the motion that was just read, that is what the motion to instruct calls for.

Now, we do not cover the waterfront and take out every change that we find objectionable and make every change that we feel needs to be made, but we do send the conferees a strong message, and that is to get rid of the worst of the entitlement reconciliation directives in this budget resolution.

First of all, Medicare. Originally, our Republican colleagues on the Committee on the Budget sought to cut Medicare by \$262 billion and Medicaid by \$110 billion. That was to offset the cost of their prescription drug benefit under Medicare. We tried to knock out these cuts in markup, but failed. The chairman, however, did change his mark twice. After these modifications were made, however, the Committee on Ways and Means is still directed to cut \$62 billion out of entitlement programs in its jurisdiction. This sort of saving can only come from two sources under the Committee on Ways and Means jurisdiction: Medicare or programs for the poor, the earned income tax credit, temporary assistance to needy families, or supplemental security income. It will have to come out of these programs, \$62 billion; and these could be critical cuts in critically important programs.

The chairman's amendment, the manager's amendment also shaved the reconciliation directions just slightly to the Committee on Energy and Commerce from \$110 billion to \$107 billion.

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But of this amount, \$94 billion must still come from Medicaid, or SCHIP,

the children's health insurance program. Contrast that, Mr. Speaker, to what we do in our budget resolution, or would have done had it passed. Given the struggle that all the States are having with Medicaid, we sought to increase the Federal share and lighten the States' burden by adding \$10 billion at the Federal level to the cost of Medicaid this year.

If the rule had allowed during consideration of the budget, we would have offered amendments when the budget was on the floor to strike all of these cuts. Since everyone knows that they would have emasculated Medicare and Medicaid, I think they would have passed; but we were not allowed to make such an amendment.

Next, veterans. Originally, the Republicans on the Committee on the Budget set out to cut \$30 billion from the budget for the veterans. They say that veterans benefits actually increase in their budget, and they may in nominal dollars. But this is the fact of the matter: Their budget resolution, as brought to the floor, provided \$15 billion less for veterans health care than the President requested, and it still provides less for veterans disability benefits.

Next, education. The Republican resolution not only cuts appropriations for education below the President's already-low level, it saves none of the 47 programs that the President wiped out or would kill. It goes a step further: It whacks \$9.4 billion out of mandatory spending. What does the Committee on Education and the Workforce have in its jurisdiction? Student loans and school lunches. Do we really want to cut student loans and school lunches to pay for a dividend tax exclusion?

Next, railroad retirees. Looking everywhere for programs they could cut to offset a big tax cut of another \$1.35 trillion, our colleagues on the Committee on the Budget even called on the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure to come up with some reconciliation savings, namely, \$3.7 billion out of its mandatory or entitlement programs.

The only source that can produce such a cut under the jurisdiction of that committee is railroad retirement, a vested benefit on which 700,000 retirees depend. Surely we are not going to cut \$3.7 billion out of that.

Finally, in the same vein, is agriculture. The budget, as it now stands, requires the Committee on Agriculture to cut \$18.6 billion of direct spending over the next 10 years, but as in all of the other cases, it fails to mention which programs and fails to say how much.

Where does the Committee on Agriculture go? It can turn to the conservation reserve program, \$18.6 billion, roughly what it costs to run that program for 10 years; or the Committee on Agriculture could turn to food stamps and take 12 percent out of food stamps for the next 10 years to produce \$18.6 billion. But do we want to take 34 million acres of environmentally sensitive